

References

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Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* and Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* in Morocco

Mark Andrews

The River Sous on Morocco's Atlantic coast just south of Agadir is an important resting place for large numbers of waders, gulls and terns, especially during the migration period. Whilst visiting the area on 5 May 1995 I found that the incoming tide was bringing large numbers of waders, particularly *Calidris* sandpipers in summer plumage, to gather and feed in the narrow channels adjacent to the King's palace. Given the excellent light conditions and the birds' proximity, I positioned myself slightly upstream and sat and watched as the birds filtered down toward me. These were predominantly Little Stint *Calidris minuta* with smaller numbers of Dunlin *C. alpina* and Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*.

Amongst the beautifully rich and dapper Little Stints appeared a classically 'odd' bird, roughly the same size though bulkier with a shorter primary projection and slightly heavier, blunt-tipped bill. It lacked the warm 'foxy' colouration and showed no trace of the mantle braces so evident in its congeners. The combination of structure and plumage features meant the bird had to be an adult Semipalmated Sandpiper in breeding plumage, an age with which I was unfamiliar. My experience was based on observations of first-year birds in the UK. Having been disturbed by some over zealous horse riders the bird disappeared for a short while before I found it once again feeding amongst the Little Stint and took the following notes.

Structure

Slightly bulkier, more pot-bellied than accompanying Little Stints with an obviously shorter primary projection.

Bare parts

Bill: black, heavier with a much stouter base and a classic 'blob' tip.

Legs: black, distinct palmations between outer and

middle toes very difficult to see except as the bird walked toward observer pausing momentarily.

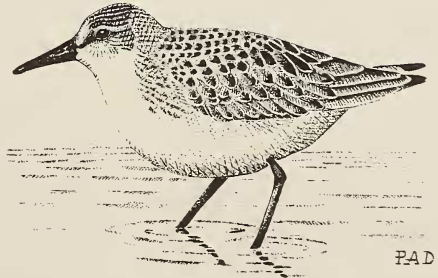
Plumage

Head: crown streaking appeared darker over the buff ground colour and gave a slight 'capped' appearance. Lores and ear coverts darker with more diffuse smudging. Supercilium to nape whiter with distinctly more pronounced sooty streaking.

Upperparts: generally dull looking with the ground colour of the mantle slightly 'buffy' but lacking any warm rufous tones. Distinctly pale-centred coverts lacking rufous fringes and contrasting sharply with dark centred scapulars. Rather plain sooty-grey-centred tertials with pale off-white fringes. Primaries black. Underparts: White with distinctly streaked breast and foreflanks.

No call was heard since the bird was never isolated from the main group of waders.

In attempting later to relocate the bird for colleagues, I noticed a sudden splash nearby that diverted our attention. After bathing frantically in a small muddy pool some 10 m away, a small dark wader emerged onto dry land. It was a stunning Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* in full breeding plumage. The magic of vagrancy!



Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*
Pete Dennis

Structure

Very similar to Common Sandpiper *A. hypoleucos* in appearance though distinctly shorter tailed, creating a much more compact, neat bird. Bill in comparison with Common Sandpiper was perhaps longer and slightly drooping.

Bare parts

Bill: flesh coloured with a dark tip.

legs: flesh coloured.

Plumage

Generally slightly darker greyer brown than Common Sandpiper (although the bird was wet, which will probably have increased the impression of a dark appearance) with a more pronounced supercilium and heavily black-spotted underparts.

Discussion

The former constitutes the second record for mainland Africa if accepted and the latter possibly the second or third record¹. The occurrence of two va-

grant Nearctic waders at the same location at the same time with an adult summer Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* found at Oued Massa on the same day during a period of strong westerly winds, suggests the likelihood of their recent arrival. However, the possibility of west-to-east vagrancy across the south Atlantic during spring (ie South America to West Africa) and then northward movement up the east Atlantic seaboard is also quite feasible.

Acknowledgements

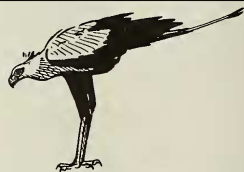
I would like to thank Duncan Macdonald and Joseph Thompson for the opportunity to visit this fascinating country once again.

References

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Letters



Grey-necked Picathartes

May I comment on the distribution of the Grey-necked Picathartes *Picathartes oreas* in Cameroon in the recent past, and correct a misconception which has crept into Green's paper in *Bull. ABC* of August 1995².

Collar & Stuart¹ presented a comprehensive review of the distribution of the species in SW Cameroon and Thompson & Fotso³ comment on the fragility of the fragmented populations of *Picathartes* spp in Cameroon and Sierra Leone.

In the introduction of Green² reference is made to three populations of *Picathartes oreas*: that within Korup National Park, in the adjacent Cross River National Park in Nigeria and, incorrectly, 'near Mamfe in Cameroon' in Moore⁴.

There are several recent records from Mamfe, which is 100 kms NE of Korup, for example Serle in 1952 and 1954, Golding in 1968 and Eisentraut in 1973 all cited by Collar & Stuart¹, but the breeding colony described in Moore⁴ was much closer to Korup, in the Meme Division of Cameroon, 75 kms SE

of Korup. The two colonies were found in caves near Lake Barombi Mbo at Kumba. (Their exact locality was not disclosed in 1974, because of unauthorised collecting in Cameroon at that time.)

Until the 1960s the population extended right across the Southwest Province of Cameroon from Mount Kupe to the Nigerian border. Serle considered *P. oreas* to be rather sedentary (pers. comm. 1975) and the destruction of the forest by road building and timber extraction to the east and north of Kumba, together with rapid urban expansion from that time, is likely to have isolated the eastern, Mount Kupe, population.

The population to the west of Kumba is probably larger than is presently realised. There is suitable habitat throughout the Rumpi Hills, north of Korup, reaching the Nigerian border and it seems likely that breeding colonies will be found there.

Picathartes oreas are surprisingly difficult to see in the forest away from the breeding sites. Reichenow⁵, in his

description of the type specimen taken at Victor was, even then, a very well worked area.

My thanks are due to Dr Walter Thiede for translating Reichenow's description of *Picathartes oreas* into English for me.

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